

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-05 L-02

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R 171600Z DEC 74

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7731

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 7727

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MPOL, LY, TS

SUBJECT: TUNISIAN ARMY MANEUVERS END; BOURGUIBA

PROMISES MODERN ARMS

REF: IR 68970184-74.

1. THE TUNISIAN ARMED FORCES 1974 MANEUVERS (SEE REF-TEL FOR DETAILS) ENDED DEC 13 WITH A PARADE AND SPEECHES IN MARETH, NEAR GABES. CLOSING CEREMONY AS REPORTED IN PRESS, ATTENDED BY PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA, SENIOR CIVILIAN DEFENSE OFFICIALS, AND FOREIGN MILITARY ATTACHES, AS WELL AS TUNISIAN HIGH COMMAND. ARMY CHIEF-OF-STAFF MAJOR GENERAL HABIB ESSOUSSI OPENED THE CEREMONY WITH A SPEECH IN WHICH HE SAID THAT THE MANEUVERS WERE DESIGNED SOLELY FOR TRAINING AND TESTING. HE DECLARED THAT ARMY WOULD NATURALLY LIKE TO HAVE MORE MODERN EQUIPMENT, BUT THAT IT FULLY ACCEPTS WISDOM OF BOURGUIBA'S POLICY OF GIVING PRIORITY TO EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND HOUSING AND THUS PERMIT A HIGHER LIVING STANDARD FOR TUNISIANS. HE SAID THAT TUNISIAN DEFENSE DOES NOT DEPEND ENTIRELY ON MILITARY ACTION BUT ALSO ON "GENERALIZED POPULAR DEFENSE" WHICH ARMY HOPES TO TEST IN NEXT MANEUVERS. ESSOUSSI FINISHED WITH EXPRESSION OF GENERAL SUPPORT FOR BOURGUIBA AND ASSUR-
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ANCE THAT ARMY WILL OBEY HIM AS MILITARY LAW REQUIRES,

WITHOUT HESTIATION OR MURMUR.

2. AFTER ESSOUSSI SPEECH, BOURGUIBA CIRCULATED AMONG OFFICERS AND ACCORDING PRESS TOLD THEM THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS DETERMINED TO PROVIDE ARMY WITH NECESSARY MEANS TO ACCOMPLISH ITS DEFENSIVE TASKS AND THAT ALTHOUGH SOCIAL POLICY HAS PRIORITY, THE INVULNERABILITY OF THE COUNTRY REQUIRES A STRONG ARMY. BOURGUIBA THEN SAID THAT "WE HAVE THE FIRM INTENTION OF SUPPLYING THE ARMY WITH MODERN TECHNOLOGICAL EQUIPMENT SO THAT IT IS UP TO ITS MISSION OF PROTECTING THE PEOPLE FROM ORDEALS AND COVETOUSNESS." HE SAID THE EQUIPMENT WOULD BE OBTAINED SOON AND ADDED THAT HE RELIED ON THE OFFICERS AND TROOPS SO THAT THE ARMY WOULD BE WORTHY OF THE CONFIDENCE OF THE PEOPLE.

3. COMMENT: LOCATION AND NATURE OF MANEUVERS CLEARLY RELATED TO GOT'S FEARS OF LIBYAN DESIGNS ON SOUTHERN REGION OF THE COUNTRY. PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA'S PROMISE TO PROVIDE ARMY WITH MODERN EQUIPMENT IN NEAR FUTURE IS A SIGNIFICANT PUBLIC COMMITMENT AND UNDERLINES HIGH LEVEL GOT CONCERN EXPRESSED TO US RECENTLY OVER TUNISIA'S WEAK DEFENSE POSTURE. (TUNIS 7659).
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